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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 001902

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DEPT FOR SCA/FO AND SCA/PB
DCHA/OFDA FOR ROBERT THAYER
AID/W FOR AA MARK WARD AND ANE ANNE DIX
DCHA/FFP FOR MATTHEW NIMS AND PAUL NOVICK
ROME FOR FODAG
BANGKOK FOR RDM/A TOM DOLAN, BOB BARTON
KATHMANDU FOR USAID OFDA BILL BERGER AND SUE MCINTYRE

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TAGS: [BG](#) [EAID](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: DEFINING THE USG ROLE AS BANGLADESH BEGINS ITS
LONG ROAD OF RECOVERY FROM CYCLONE SIDR'S DEVASTATION

REV: A. DHAKA 1882
[1](#)B. DHAKA 1836

Classified By: CDA A.I. GEETA PASI. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The prompt and effective response to Cyclone Sidr's devastation has saved many thousands of lives and averted a potential political crisis for Bangladesh's weak Caretaker Government. The USG response during this initial phase was a model of Diplomacy-Defense-Development working in tandem. It is now imperative that the USG and other donors provide support to Bangladesh as it confronts the much more daunting challenges of recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction. Just as was the case during the initial phase, the USG must develop and implement a holistic response to help Bangladesh meet the challenges ahead. To use a medical metaphor, the patient survived the initial trauma, but the road to recovery will be long and will require even more resources. Our overriding policy goal is to help nurse the Caretaker Government along over the next 12 months as it prepares to hold elections and transfer power to an elected successor. In order to achieve this goal, we must devote sufficient resources to a comprehensive program to help restore livelihoods, begin reconstruction, and ensure food security for an increasingly vulnerable population. The next four months will be critical to determining whether or not the Caretaker Government is able to survive and fulfill its mandate. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) It has been three weeks since Cyclone Sidr made landfall in southwestern Bangladesh, causing far-reaching damage across 30 of the country's 64 districts, and affecting the lives of 5.5 million people, with early estimates placing economic damages at \$2.3 billion. Thousands of lives were saved as a result of investments in early warning and disaster preparedness systems and thanks to the immediate response by the Bangladesh military, local and international

NGOs. The USG provided leadership among Bangladesh's donor partners in responding to the cyclone's devastation, with USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) providing \$19.5 million in assistance for the initial emergency response phase. At the request of the Government of Bangladesh, the U.S. military began Operation Sea Angel II on November 26 to assist with the delivery of food, water, and medical services to vulnerable populations in remote areas in the cyclone affected area. On December 7, this first phase of the disaster response will come to a close as Operation Sea Angel II winds down and USAID/OFDA transition to early recovery activities. In this initial phase, the USG effectively integrated diplomatic, information, military and economic tools to achieve our policy objective of saving lives and averting a potential political crisis for the Caretaker Government.

13. (C) The USG's response during the first three weeks of Bangladesh's recovery from Cyclone Sidr has garnered accolades from the public, from the Caretaker Government, and from the Army. While there have been dissonant voices, the overwhelming public sentiment has been to welcome the strong USG support. Our public diplomacy message has been that the USG was here before the cyclone, was here during the immediate relief phase, and will be here throughout the recovery and rehabilitation phases. As Operation Sea Angel II winds down and the soldier, sailors, airmen and marines depart, it is important that we have ways of fulfilling the commitment to remain engaged over the long term. We also need to ensure that the already vulnerable population in southwestern Bangladesh does not fall prey to extremist groups, some of whom may also see an opportunity in the

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current environment to win recruits.

14. (C) In collaboration with counterparts in Washington, we have developed proposals for relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction activities that would be implemented by USAID and DOD. These activities would build upon previous successes in developing physical and social infrastructure, protecting the environment, enhancing community participation, and strengthening military-military relations. We have proposed a multi-year program that would dovetail with our short-term development assistance activities and rely upon previously tested implementing mechanisms. While we would be able to jump start these activities with existing resources, these would be wholly inadequate for a longer term response. An important adjunct to this proposal is the imperative to address Bangladesh's emergency food needs. As reported previously, Bangladesh faces a serious food shortfall and has repeatedly asked the donor community for assistance in averting a crisis over the next six months. We propose a substantial USG contribution to help address the 500,000 MT food requirement that the GOB has requested from donors.

15. (C) Over the next four months, the survival of Bangladesh's weak Caretaker Government could be at stake and along with it the prospects for a restoration of democracy by the end of 2008. As we saw in August 2007 when student protests threatened to topple the regime, a minor spark can set off the tinderbox of discontent with rising prices and uncertainty about the country's political future. Our engagement is essential to provide support to the Government, to avoid a regime-threatening crisis, and retain influence with senior civilian and military decision makers. Other key international partners share our analysis, and are also working to convince their governments to provide resources to respond to the current challenges facing Bangladesh. Chief Adviser Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed has asked donors for \$1 billion to help meet the rehabilitation and reconstruction needs related to the cyclone. As officials in Washington consider our request for additional resources to respond to Bangladesh's relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and food security needs, we recommend that they keep in mind both the

danwars and the opportunities presented by the current crisis. The USG can, and should, be in the lead in responding to Bangladesh's needs.
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